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Letter dated 24 May 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as the current Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, I have the honour to send you the Political Message from the Committee of Ministers for communication to the special session of the General Assembly on children (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 42.

(*Signed*) Claudia **Fritsche**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 24 May 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
Committee of Ministers

Ministers' Deputies

CM Documents

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Political Message from the Committee of Ministers for communication to the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children (New York, 19-21 September 2001)

Internet : http://cmline.coe.int (password access)
Intranet : http://cmline.dctnet.coe.int

I. OUR PLEDGE

We, the Governments of the 43 member States of the Council of Europe, all Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reaffirm our commitment to the principles agreed at the World Summit for Children on 30 September 1990.

We recognise the importance and universality of the standards enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and pledge to comply with our obligations for its implementation. We are resolved to promote the well-being of girls and boys and to address, both in Europe and elsewhere, the problems and distress deriving from poverty, discrimination and violence. We see children as an asset and believe they should be given the means and opportunities to participate actively in improving their living conditions.

We therefore welcome this Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children and the regional preparatory Conference in Berlin (16-18 May 2001). We also pay tribute to the achievements of the United Nations, and in particular UNICEF, in promoting the rights of the child, to the work of the governmental and non-governmental organisations and all people who are striving to build a child-friendly world for this and future generations.

We reaffirm that children are entitled to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms as individuals and active legal subjects. Since, due to their age, they are vulnerable and have special needs they need specific protection. We therefore pledge to work for the protection of children and the promotion of a child-friendly society and to make the best interests of the child a primary consideration in decision-making.

II. PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

As members of an Organisation committed to Human Rights and the Rule of Law, we safeguard the rights of the child through legal instruments including the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. The resultant case law of the European Court of Human Rights has had a profound effect on all our member States. Children are also protected by the European Social Charter.

As a follow-up to Article 4 of the United Nations Convention, we prepared the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, which entered into force in 2000. The Convention and its Standing Committee promote procedural rights, mediation and national bodies for children, which may include Ombudsmen.

III. PROMOTING A CHILD-FRIENDLY SOCIETY

As members of an Organisation that promotes social cohesion we are committed to building a child-friendly society in which parents or those caring for children are able to provide safe, stable and supportive environments for their development. In the interests of children and family life, we support families, particularly those in difficulties, and we are determined to help parents achieve a better balance between working and family life.

We are convinced that social, health and day-care measures, as well as access to quality education and care, are essential to enable children to fulfil their potential. We therefore pledge to develop equal access to education and health for all children, to combat all forms of discrimination and to pay special attention to children with particular needs. We recognise the need to monitor effectively the impact of our policies in order to ensure they benefit all children.

We believe that children should be given opportunities in family life, at school, during their leisure time and in society at large to participate actively, according to their age and development, in decision-making on matters concerning them. They should be able to receive information and express their views in their mother tongue.

We support UNICEF's work in conducting polls of children's views.

We are also promoting new ways of dealing with young offenders and improving juvenile justice systems in member States.

IV. FUTURE COUNCIL OF EUROPE ACTION

To promote the legal status of the child, we will pursue our efforts to finalise instruments and implement principles concerning:

- the establishment and legal consequences of parentage (parental responsibilities, maintenance, name, nationality, succession, and, as far as possible, the right to know his or her origins);

- the right of a child to have appropriate contacts, including transfrontier contacts, with both parents and with other persons having family ties with him or her.

To strengthen the protection of children against exploitation, violence and abuse in criminal law we will review existing instruments and improve their effectiveness.

We undertake to call on all our member States, which have not yet done so to ratify and implement fully all treaties and apply all standards, which promote the best interests of the child including the two optional protocols to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To promote social cohesion and tackle social policy issues affecting children, we will use knowledge gained from Council of Europe programmes and work in particular through its new Forum for Children and Families, which includes children as participants:

- to promote active participation of children in decision-making, according to their age and development and in co-operation with interested non-governmental organisations;

- to combat crime, violence and marginalisation by addressing family, school and neighbourhood problems;

- to improve the conditions for children living in residential care and to ensure the proper re-integration of child-victims of exploitation, violence and abuse.

V. A COMMON AGENDA

We are resolved to take forward the promotion of the rights and the active participation of the child world wide by:

- sharing with other world regions, bearing in mind their specific situation and resources, the Council of Europe's experience of developing and implementing standard-setting instruments and policies in the legal, social, and cultural fields;

- examining in depth the interrelationship between social development and full enjoyment by children of their rights, on which we would welcome the organisation of a specific inter-regional forum jointly with the United Nations to look into the main obstacles and exchange good practice;

- working with the United Nations on the legal protection of the rights of the child, to promote their exercise and to prevent trafficking in girls and boys, child pornography, including pornography in cyberspace and other forms of exploitation;

- supporting awareness raising initiatives in particular by proclaiming an annual International Day of the Rights of the Child, should the United Nations General Assembly so decide.